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**TO: Economic Support Supervisors
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**FROM: Amy Mendel-Clemens
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BHCE/BWP OPERATIONS MEMO

No: 04-40

DATE: 8/02/2004

FS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
CTS	<input type="checkbox"/>	CC	<input type="checkbox"/>	W-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
FSET	<input type="checkbox"/>	EA	<input type="checkbox"/>	CF	<input type="checkbox"/>
JAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	JC	<input type="checkbox"/>	RAP	<input type="checkbox"/>
WIA	<input type="checkbox"/>	WtW	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other	EP	<input type="checkbox"/>	★		

PRIORITY: HIGH

SUBJECT: Food Stamp and Medicaid Self Assessment Internet Based Tool (ACCESS.Wi.gov)

EFFECTIVE DATE: August 16, 2004

PURPOSE

This memo outlines:

- A new online self-assessment tool that will allow Wisconsin residents to assess their potential eligibility for the Food Stamp Program (FSP), Family Medicaid (MA) (including BadgerCare) and SeniorCare (SC). The new, ACCESS to Eligibility Support Services for Health and Nutrition can be found at ACCESS.Wi.gov
- The addition of a question to the CARES client registration screen (CRIN) that will help evaluate the use of this tool.

BACKGROUND

This past summer, USDA awarded the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services a \$1.7 million grant to develop and implement Internet-based access tools for FS, MA, and other services and benefits. The project is designed to increase participation in the FSP, increase consumer awareness of potential eligibility for food stamps and other nutrition and health care programs, improve customer service, and improve the quality of applications submitted to local agencies. One key strategy in the Governor's KidsFirst Initiative is to increase FSP enrollment among eligible families and individuals.

The self-assessment tool is designed to encourage consumers to apply for benefits by helping them understand their potential eligibility. Many potentially eligible people have misperceptions about the eligibility requirements, especially for the FSP. They may choose not to apply because of incorrect assumptions about their potential level of benefits or specific policies – such as the vehicle asset rule – that have changed over time. Many people believe the application process would involve too much time and effort unless they feel reasonably confident that they will be eligible for benefits.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION DATES

August 2004 - This initial phase, launched on August 16, 2004, is an online self-assessment tool that will allow Wisconsin residents to find out more about their potential eligibility for FS, MA (including BadgerCare), and SC.

December 2004 - The self-assessment tool will expand to include Elderly, Blind, Disabled (EBD) MA and Women, Infants and Children (WIC). We may expand later to include other state programs.

October 2005 - The web site will expand to include an online application for food stamp benefits and Medicaid, as well as online tools that allow people who are currently receiving benefits to find out about the status of their benefits and report changes to their caseworker.

January 2006 - The self-assessment tool may expand again to include select local and state programs.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Because the USDA funds this project we are required to evaluate the degree to which the online self-assessment tool helps to increase enrollment in the FSP. We will be evaluating the project in a number of ways, including the number of “hits”, or visits, to the web site. A question will be added to the CARES CRIN screen that will help us measure the number of people who used the online self-assessment tool and then visited the local office to apply.

CARES CHANGES

CRIN

A mandatory question will be added to CARES CRIN screen, which will prompt Client Registration staff to ask if an applicant used the online self-screening tool prior to coming in to apply. Client Registration staff will be required to ask and answer this question by entering Y or N before they are allowed to move off this screen. Workers are to enter N when processing a mail in application or when the applicant is not present to indicate whether the self-assessment tool was used.

SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL DESCRIPTION

The self-assessment tool is designed so that anyone with access to a computer and an Internet connection can answer 10 to 15 simple questions about their household circumstances and

income to assess their potential eligibility for benefit programs. An identical site in Spanish will be available shortly after the launch of the English version.

When a user has completed the self-assessment questions, they will receive information about the programs for which they may be eligible, including a conservative range of likely food stamp benefits. It will also provide a phone number for the appropriate county or tribal office and links to the DHFS application forms for Medicaid and SeniorCare. Users will have the option of printing out a summary of the information they put into the self-assessment tool, as well as their results and information regarding referrals to the local agency.

SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Although the self-assessment tool does not provide or require any direct link to any local agencies, we anticipate that people who have used the tool will apply for food stamp benefits, Medicaid, and SeniorCare. They may call or visit the local agency and refer to the results they received from the self-assessment. When they visit the office, they may bring the print out summarizing the information they provided and the results they received based on that information. Following is a summary of the questions users will answer and the key logic differences between this screening process and a full eligibility determination from CARES.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

To provide a reliable assessment of eligibility, the self-assessment tool asks about most basic eligibility requirements, including:

1. Age and gender of each person in the home;
2. Basic family relationships in the home, including marriage and parent-child relationships;
3. Pregnancy status;
4. Disability status;
5. Amount of gross earned income, including tips, bonuses, commissions, and self-employment income;
6. Amount and type of other kinds of income, including SSI and child support payments received, as well as Social Security, Unemployment Compensation and other kinds of unearned income;
7. Amount of child care expenses;
8. Amount of child support payments paid;
9. Amount of rent or mortgage payments;
10. Whether heat payments are paid separately from rent;
11. County of residence; and
12. Residence on tribal lands.

To ensure that the self-assessment questions can be completed in a 15-minute session, and to avoid questions that might discourage a user from applying for benefits, the self-assessment tool does not ask questions about the following eligibility considerations:

1. Number of people who purchase and prepare food together;
2. Full names and addresses;
3. Social security numbers;
4. Immigration status;
5. Assets (we will add asset questions when the screener is expanded to include EBD Medicaid);
6. Absent parents and child support cooperation;
7. Drug felon or fleeing felon status;
8. Student or striker status;

9. Migrant worker status;
10. Elder care expenses;
11. Non-heating utility expenses;
12. Receipt of health insurance;
13. Receipt of MA;
14. Homelessness;
15. IPV or sanction status; and
16. Work requirements.

Many of these eligibility considerations will be addressed in disclaimers present on the page where users receive their results. Following is a list of all of the possible result messages and disclaimers that a user might see:

Food Stamps

Condition/Disclaimer	Message
Ineligible household	Based on what you told us today, it looks like your household has too much income right now to get food stamp benefits.
Eligible household	It looks like your household may be able to get between \$X and \$X to buy food each month.
Eligible household, low benefit amount	It looks like your household may be able to get at least \$10 > to buy food each month.
Eligible household, low benefit amount	Keep in mind that even a small number of food stamp benefits each month can help you buy more meat, fruits, and vegetables. And over the course of a year, these benefits can really add up!
Eligible for expedited services	Because of your situation, it also looks like you could get food stamp benefits about a week after you apply.
Not eligible for expedited services	It looks like you could get food stamp benefits about a month after you apply.
General disclaimer for eligible households	Keep in mind that some people are not able to get food stamp benefits, including some people on strike, some immigrants without papers, and some college students. In most cases, their children and other people in the home may still be able to get benefits.
General disclaimer for eligible households	A special note for immigrants: getting food stamp benefits will not hurt your citizenship status.
Disclaimer for eligible households living on tribal lands	Keep in mind that anyone who is receiving food through a tribal food distribution program will need to choose between getting that program and getting food stamp benefits. You won't be able to enroll in both programs at the same time.
Message for eligible households	If you have questions about the Food Stamp Program, click here to learn more.

Medicaid And BadgerCare

Condition/Disclaimer	Message
Ineligible household – no child or pregnancy	Based on what you told us today, it looks like no one in your home is under 19 or pregnant. This means the people in your home won't be able to get low- or no-cost health care for families.
EBD Medicaid disclaimer for households with no child or pregnancy	However, if someone in your home is blind, disabled, 65 or older, they may be able to get free or low-cost health care.
Ineligible household – too much income	Based on what you told us today, it looks like the people in your home have too much income right now to get low- or no-cost health care for families.

Ineligible household – too much income	However, children and pregnant women in the home might still be able to get low- or no-cost health care, especially if the family has medical bills.
Eligible for Medicaid	It looks like X may be able to get low- or no-cost health care through the Medicaid program.
Eligible for BadgerCare, no premium	It looks like X may be able to get low- or no-cost health care through the BadgerCare program, if they don't have health insurance from someone's job or some other place.
Eligible for BadgerCare with premium	It looks like X may be able to get low-cost health care through the BadgerCare program, if they don't have health insurance from someone's job or some other place. It also looks like they will have to pay a monthly fee to get this care
Family Planning Waiver disclaimer	In addition, X may be able to get special health care for women, even if they already have health insurance.
General disclaimer for all eligible households	A special note for immigrants: getting low- or no-cost health care will not hurt your immigration status. Keep in mind that in some cases, immigrants are only able to get health care in emergencies.
General disclaimer for all eligible households	Other people in your home also have the right to apply for these programs, as well as for other kinds of health care assistance.
Message for eligible households	If you have questions about the Medicaid Program, click here to learn more.
Message for eligible households	If you have questions about the BadgerCare Program, click here to learn more.

SeniorCare

Condition/Disclaimer	Message
Ineligible for SeniorCare	Based on what you told us today, it looks like no one in your home is 65 or older. This means you won't be able to get help buying prescription drugs through the SeniorCare program.
Eligible for SeniorCare	It looks like X will be able to get help through Senior Care Level X. Please click the Details button to get more information about this benefit.
Residency and Medicaid disclaimer for eligible people	In order to get SeniorCare, these individuals must be a legal resident of Wisconsin and cannot already be getting help through the Medicaid program.
Medicaid message for eligible people	Depending on their income, they may be also be able to get free or low-cost health care through Medicaid.
Message for eligible households	If you have questions about the SeniorCare Program, click here to learn more.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ELIGIBILITY LOGIC

In general, the self-assessment eligibility logic is very similar to the eligibility logic used in CARES. The logic will create groups for MA, FS, and SC, and it will consider income according to CARES logic. Because the self-assessment tool test for these programs is based on a single set of information from the user, some information is processed differently than CARES. For purposes of the self-assessment tool:

- All people living in the home are assumed part of the food unit.
- People under age 19 are considered children for all programs.
- All earned income for children aged 17 and under is disregarded for the Food Stamp Program, regardless of their student status.

- All earned income for children aged 18 and under is disregarded for Medicaid.
- Any pregnant woman is assumed to have only one fetus.
- If a user does not pay for heat separately from rent or mortgage, the Limited Utility Allowance will be used, regardless of the actual utility costs.
- Because the self-assessment does not ask about immigration, striker, student, drug felon, or fleeing felon status, it will not deem income belonging to ineligible individuals.
- People who are under 19 and have children of their own, are not considered to be a separate Medicaid group from other parents in the home.

NOTE ➤In addition, if a group fails the income test for MA, the self-assessment tool does not reconfigure the group for a Family Fiscal Unit (FFU).

COMMUNICATING WITH APPLICANTS ABOUT THE SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Because this self-assessment covers only the most basic eligibility questions, there is some risk that an applicant will have received positive results from the self-assessment tool but is not actually eligible for benefits. This is a risk that we will manage through the text and messages on the self-assessment results screen, as well as working with the community agencies that will provide many applicants with access to the tools. In addition, the following talking points may be useful when discussing self-assessment results with applicants:

- As described on the first page of the self-assessment, this tool is just a simple test to see if someone *might* be able to get benefits. No one can get benefits without completing the application process.
- The self-assessment tool is much more simple than the application process because we wanted to give people a chance to spend just a little bit of time and find out whether or not it looks like it is worth taking the time to apply.
- Because the self-assessment is a simplified version of the application, there are some ways in which it isn't always accurate. We tried to err on the side of telling people they are eligible instead of telling people who could be eligible that they are not.
- We did not ask about a number of things that may make people ineligible, such as intentional program violations, work program sanctions, immigration status, student or striker status, drug felon or fleeing felon status, and child support cooperation. We left those questions out for two reasons. First, these can be complicated issues and we did not want people to be confused by them and not apply. The other is that children in families with ineligible people are often still eligible, and it is important to try to get those children enrolled.
- No matter what the self-assessment results, everyone has the right to apply for FS, MA and SC.

TRAINING

No training is planned for the self-assessment component of this project. However, in October 2005 when the website expands to include an online application and other online tools, training programs will be offered to appropriate local agency staff.

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★Program Categories – FS – Food Stamps, MA – Medicaid, SC – Senior Care, CTS – Caretaker Supplement, CC – Child Care, W-2 – Wisconsin Works, FSET – Food Stamp Employment and Training, CF – Children First, EA – Emergency Assistance, JAL – Job Access Loan, JC - Job Center Programs, RAP – Refugee Assistance Program, WtW – Welfare to Work, WIA – Workforce Investment Act, Other EP – Other Employment Programs.